

Representative James A. Leach  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific  
Full Committee Hearing on  
"Proposed Sale of F-16 Aircraft and Weapons Systems to Pakistan"  
July 20, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this timely hearing. I will be brief.

I am inclined to be supportive of the substantive case for providing this particular aircraft and related weapons systems to our close friends and allies in Pakistan.

Obviously, in an ideal world we wouldn't need to contemplate such a sale. Indeed, arguably the first order of business for United States assistance in Pakistan should be to assist the strengthening of civil society and address issues relating to education, ongoing sectarian violence, the political system, and so forth.

Having said that, given our desire to forge a stable, long-term relationship with Pakistan, as well as, of course, Islamabad's extensive cooperation in the campaign on terrorism, I believe Washington must be sensitive to Pakistan's assessment that its air force needs significant upgrading and modernization. While I do not view this proposed sale as integral to ongoing operations against Al Qaeda or pro-Taliban elements along the Afghan border, I also do not believe this proposed agreement would materially impact the overall balance of power in South Asia. Indeed, given growing power disparities on the Subcontinent, it is possible that it may well have a stabilizing effect.

It goes without saying, of course, that the Congress looks forward to the continuing cooperation of Pakistan in apprehending the Taliban leadership and militia that continue to be engaged in hostile operations against the Karzai government and coalition forces in Afghanistan. Likewise, we continue to hope and expect that Islamabad will maintain its commitment to the peace process with India, including -- as President Musharraf has promised -- full cooperation with the authorities in Delhi as the investigation into the horrific Mumbai bombings continue.

Having said all that, Mr. Chairman, I am fully supportive of the position you have taken with respect to the prerogatives of this Committee and look forward to the testimony of our witness.

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